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Dexter, Elizabeth H.

The problem of the county home child

Hartford, CT

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A Study made under the auspices of The Connecticut State Board of Charities

By
Elizabeth H. Dexter
and
Grace F. Marcus

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Introduction

THE Department of Child Welfare of the Connecticut State Board of Charities has long realized the inadequacy of its equipment to meet the problem of the dependent and neglected children of the State who come under its supervision as wards of the County Temporary Homes. In order that a study might be conducted under the auspices of the Department, to show the extent and complexity of the problem and the directions in which a solution must be sought, Mrs. Henry Ferguson of Hartford placed a generous fund at the disposal of the State Board of Charities. Mrs. Ferguson was for a number of years a member of the Juvenile Commission of the city of Hartford and has shown a deep and helpful interest in the work for County Home children conducted by the Child Welfare Department of the State Board since its inception in 1917. Two counties of the State were selected as the basis of the study, one containing several large, industrial communities, and the other being less densely populated and more agricultural in character. The Boards of Management, or the county commissioners, (who in each county constitute a majority of the board), gave their consent without objection, that the study be made in their respective counties.

Two young women of special training and qualifications for the work were selected to make the survey,—Miss Elizabeth H. Dexter, a graduate of The University of Wisconsin and Smith College Training School for Social Workers, who had had experience as an investigator for the Children's Bureau, United States Department of Labor, as well as in psychiatric social work at the Manhattan State Hospital, New York City; and Miss Grace F. Marcus, a graduate of Cornell University and of the Smith College Training School for Social Workers, who likewise had been connected with the Federal Children's Bureau and the Manhattan State Hospital, New York City.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

At the time a child is committed to the County Home, guardianship is removed from the parents and placed in the hands of the Board of Management of the County Home to which the child is committed. It becomes then the duty of the Board or those acting for it to formulate a plan for the future of the child, whose stay in the County Home should be, as provided by law, "for so long a time only as shall be absolutely necessary for the placing of a child in a well selected family home (Section 1766, General Statutes)." This duty, however, the Board is unable to perform properly, for in most cases it must act with little knowledge of the family history of the child and hence of the fundamental causes which brought about its commitment.

It seemed proper then to begin the study here,—with the causes of commitment, of which in general so little definite has been known. These throw a light on the possibilities which confront the child and must determine in many cases the plans for its future. In the absence of all adequate records, finding the causes would entail a comprehensive investigation of all sources of information, such as the courts, the selectmen, the county commissioners, the superintendents of the County Homes, public and private charities, the relatives and parents.

When their complete family histories have become available, the next step in the survey would be to classify the children according to possibilities of placement. Such a classification is necessary to determine, (1) those subject to strictly temporary care pending their return to the home of their parents, in case the home should be re-established through properly directed social effort; and (2) those for whose future permanent provision must be made.

The placement of a child depends, however, on another factor, its mental fitness, as a certain grade of mental defectiveness may make it unsafe to remove the child from institutional care. It was recognized that the determination of mental fitness would require special, expert investigation, and for this purpose the State Board of Charities was so fortunate as to secure the cooperation of Professor Arnold Gesell, Professor of Child Psychology and Director of the Yale University Psycho-Clinic, who agreed to examine the mentality of a large percentage of the children and give an opinion as to their

placeability based on his investigations and on the family histories furnished by the investigators.

With these purposes in view and within these limits the survey was begun on April 1, 1920, and carried out through the following nine months. During this time an investigation was made of 158 families, including 284 children who were residents of the two County Homes when the survey began.

The Sources of Information

In beginning the search for information about the families of these children, some of whom had been separated from their parents since 1909 and 1910, the investigators had as an original source the brief written record on file in the office of the State Board of Charities. This record, similar in content to the mittimus, is sent to the State Board by the superintendent of the County Temporary Home as notification of the child's admission and furnishes practically the same data as that kept by the superintendent on the institution's register:

the name of the child,
the date of commitment,
the town from which committed,
the court responsible for the commitment,
the cause of commitment as phrased in the set legal formula, "dependent, neglected, and cruelly treated child,"
the age of the child on its last birthday,
the religion and nationality of the parents.

This body of information, not always completely given and often inaccurate, comprises all the recorded data in the possession of the County and State for dealing with the children committed to their care.

Superintendents and County Commissioners

To supplement this meager information the investigators interviewed the superintendents of the County Temporary Homes in question, knowing that among their multifarious duties was that of remembering the family stories of the many children entrusted to them. At the time of a child's commitment the superintendent usually received from the county commissioner some idea of the family history, learned the obvious, immediate cause of court action,

and eventually added his own impressions of visiting parents and relatives and what he might glean from their prejudiced accounts of themselves. The professional intimacy between commissioner and superintendent, fostered by their common interest in the management of the home and the placement of children, made the superintendent the natural headquarters for all accessible unwritten history.

The county commissioner, whose acquaintance with the case even at commitment was often not personal, did not keep the memory file which the superintendent would be likely to keep for the children under daily observation. If the cause of commitment had seemed substantial, he had not inquired further. As one commissioner put it, "it was not his business to keep deserving children out of the Home." If, however, the commissioner for any reason suspected that parents were trying to evade their natural obligations by foisting their children on the County Home, he might insist in court on further investigation before commitment, but such cases rarely occur. Later, if the child proved an unsolvable placement problem, the commissioner might appeal to the State Board of Charities. **Its Child Welfare Department, equipped with two field workers to supervise 1600 State wards now placed from the County Homes, would conduct a summary investigation and take the child under its care, but the resources of the State Board have been too inadequate to exercise more than a superficial influence in most cases.** Generally, then, the commissioner, having forgotten his slight initial contact with the family and being without facilities for investigation, has had to rely on the superintendent's opinion and his own native shrewdness when a new decision affecting the child was to be made.

However conscientious he might be in the consideration of the facts at hand, he frequently could not avoid making snap judgments. It was clear that he did not fully appreciate how grave a handicap he worked under. One commissioner, on learning that a mother to whom he had returned a child for summer vacations, was immoral, exclaimed, "Well, well! And I thought she was a lady! She had such a nice refined voice over the telephone that I always let her have what she wanted." In doubtful cases, where the cause of commitment did not seem to be any of the ordinary catastrophes, another official did what he could to get the parents or someone who knew them to appear at his office so that he could get to the bottom of the trouble. He believed that "children who were defective had no place

in the County Temporary Home; if he got a good look at them in his office he could see whether they were feebleminded and keep them out." A personal interview with the parents and children was seldom necessary, in his opinion, since he could generally find out all he needed to know in some other way.

The natural keenness developed by dealing with such people often prevented superintendent or commissioner from making mistakes which their incomplete grasp of the situation would amply have excused, but at times their caution led them to act on suspicions that were not justified by those ultimate facts that lie beyond the confines of official walls. In the rural county, where some of the American families were neighborhood cases intimately known, this knowledge was judiciously exercised; but there were other cases where sensible doubts, that would nevertheless have been dispelled by investigation, settled a question unjustly. An Italian orphan whose relatives were prudently considering whether they could undertake full responsibility for his future was abruptly placed in a Temporary Home because, distrusting the motive for prudence in foreigners, the official in charge decided that the uncle had his eye on $250 worth of insurance money which the eleven year old would inherit at the age of twenty-one. This tendency to act on unverified suspicions was not confined to commissioners, for in another case a widowed father, who, as soon as he felt able to take one of his three sons home, innocently applied at court for the oldest, was suspected of an exclusive interest in the boy of working age and was told to take all or none. The official consulted did not linger to learn that the father would as willingly have taken the youngest child had he been permitted.

Other Officials

After the commissioners, the next official sources of information hunted up were local to the town from which the child was committed. The selectman, whose acquaintance with the town's poor occasionally embraced one of our families, had usually in that case a hazy memory, for the accuracy of which he did not vouch. Like the selectmen, prosecuting attorneys and probation officers remembered or failed to remember as chance and their individual capacity for remembering dictated. Typical of the fragmentary, difficult recollection to which urgent questioning compelled them was one prosecuting attorney's statement: "All I remember about that case is that the father was one-legged and the mother was called the 'Wild Rose of

Bouton'." Another local official, confronted with two foreign names in C—, said instantly that "he thought one of those men had spent four years in prison for trying to murder his brother-in-law; he couldn't remember which one it was but the name was something like C—. Ask Bogano the tailor." This tantalizing half-memory or else complete forgetfulness was what we found to be the rule. If the rule needed its confirming exception, there was the probation officer who had a memory for all significant human incident and whose aspiration was for an opportunity to "write it all down before he died." When we encountered him he was spending his days in the performance of his official duties and his nights earning a living as a watchman.

The limitations under which the local town officials work result partly from the fact that oversight of the town poor forms only one province of their diverse duties. One selectman, whose interest in his cases had led him to install records and a filing system, was brought sharply to his senses from his absorption in this phase of his work when he was summoned to court and ordered to pay $5,000 for the damage alleged to have been wrought by one of his road gangs to the hedge of a near-by estate. Whether this mishap "cured" him of his one-sided zeal is problematical, but public opinion certainly felt that he had gone too far with the poor.

The dual allegiance of town and county officials to the local purse and to the child's welfare has affected some of their decisions. The children of a hardworking widow, who was getting along with town aid, were despatched to the County Home because an official thought that "the town was tired of supporting them." In another case an epileptic child who suffered from periodic seizures was detained for several years in the County Temporary Home to the distress of all its inmates because the necessary action for sending the child back to the town of N— for his recommittal to the Mansfield State Training School and Hospital was blocked by a county commissioner from N— who rebelled against saddling his town with the child's support.

Social Agencies

The social agencies, whose files were next searched for all existent records concerning the families, abounded in two of the three cities studied in the "industrial" county, but in the "rural" county the only active agency had so recently undergone reorganization that it had nothing to give. In the industrial center of the more thickly populated county, the department of public charities had had some contact

with practically every case and had kept rather mechanical skeleton records of relief given and return payments secured. Three or four private agencies which operated on a more generous case-work scale had often known these same cases, but they had been hampered in doing fully responsible work because, until recently, their respective jurisdictions over cases had overlapped or conflicted. The investigators worked, therefore, with an embarrassment of puzzle pieces, finding sometimes three or four of a kind, yet often failing to get the key to the pattern. Aside from this purely local condition, the information which the private agency might have transmitted to the county commissioners lay buried in innumerable private files, scattered, often piecemeal and unfinished, in three or four agencies, inert and dead when it might instead have enriched and directed the vision of those who are responsible for the State's wards. The fault was not the agency's nor yet that of the commissioner. The local agency was organized for family casework. When finally it had to admit that a family must be broken up, it generally had the children committed and called the case closed. The family fragments were no longer a focus for social work and the initiative passed to the County Home administration. The County Home, lacking all means for forming a social policy for the children under its care, got from the social agency neither its insight into family potentialities nor its assistance in reestablishing the home. The usual result was that the commitment came to be a finality instead of one move in an unfinished social process, which, to be kept going, must be continually directed by casework both within and without the institution. No continuity in the social treatment of a family will be possible until some correlation is effected between the work of the social agency and that of the institution. Until then no one will be in a position to perform one of the essential services for the dependent child, that of "saving the pieces" for future use.

Parents and Relatives

The fact that much of the information by this time acquired was mere memory residue or else family records, stopping short where institutional responsibility began, left the investigators still ignorant of the present status of the child's family, and of the changes and developments which had probably occurred after its commitment. They had not yet succeeded in getting exact information as to the whereabouts of many parents. Most of the addresses furnished by

the institutions were specific only as to the town of residence, in spite of the effort they had made to get addresses from visiting parents and relatives. In some families nothing was known about either parent; in others, one or both parents had died; some had removed to other cities, some had married again persons of names unknown; still others were difficult or impossible to find because they bore foreign names improperly spelled or confusingly common in the directories. When they were found, their reaction was indicative of the lack of contact between them and the County Home system. They were not particularly forgetful or reluctant informants, even though in the large industrial city the same parents had been dunned for information by three or four different agencies. **Their interest in the children committed had become detached from their daily life, the commitment had effected an involuntary alienation of thought which no one had helped them to avoid, and nothing had been done to stimulate responsive effort toward the reestablishment of a home.** As for their stories, they too had become stale and probably a natural aversion to unhappy recollections had blunted their memory of crises, often no longer affecting their daily existence. The focus an emergency makes had been lost and the most painstaking work of investigation on some cases could not produce a complete picture of the forces which had disrupted the home.

In a minority of instances we discovered cases that if socially treated would never have become institutional. There was a working widow, thoroughly independent and conscientious, who had been allowed to commit her three boys because several unsatisfactory experiments had disgusted her with boarding homes. In another case, three children were hastily committed from the home of their grandmother because adequate provision had not been made for them while she was temporarily in a hospital. Two children, committed after a family quarrel more boisterous than serious, have remained a burden to the State for six years because their parents were given an opportunity to learn how much more they could save if they acquiesced in the unwise action of the probate court. **These originally trivial or temporary occasions for commitments that might in the first place have been averted operate as detrimentally to the child's welfare and the public purse as if the child's original plight had been incurably grave.**

Interviews with parents revealed the existence of unused opportunities for keeping children out of institutions. Interviews with relatives showed even more clearly that possibilities for placement had been definitely lost through the absence of social work prior to the actual commitment of the child. That family pride which is so sensitive to the "disgrace" of having one's own kin as public charges in an "orphan asylum" might have inspired them to the sacrifice necessary to prevent commitment, but once the commitment went into effect, the shock was survived and the greatest stimulus to giving the child a home was removed.

Findings

The investigators were now in a position to piece together the information they had gathered from these various sources and to examine the outstanding features in the histories of 158 County Home families. As a preliminary to analyzing the social background of these, certain of their external aspects were first considered, such as nationality, vital status, etc.

Table 1 Nationality of Families.

Both parents American born	64	41%
Both parents foreign born	73	46%
One parent American, one foreign born	17	11%
Nationality of parents not known	4	2%
Total	158	100%

As for nationality, it was found that in 73 families, (or 46% of the 158), both parents were foreign born; in 17, (or 11%), one parent was foreign born; and both parents were American in 64 families (or 41%). It was impossible to learn the parents' nationality in 4 families. The foreigners' predominance among our dependent families can be partially explained by his natural handicap in the struggle for economic existence and further by the fact that his widow is ineligible to assistance from the Widows' Pension Fund. Moreover, an analysis of the causes of dependency showed death the most prominent factor in the breakdown of the foreign home, and character defects in the breakdown of the American.

Table 2 Vital Status of Parents.

Both parents living	50	32%
Both parents dead	14	9%
Father dead, mother living	35	22%
Mother dead, father living	35	22%
Mother dead, status of father not known	5	3%
Mother living, status of father not known	15	10%
Father dead, status of mother not known	2	1%
Father living, status of mother not known	—	—
Status of both parents not known	2	1%
Total	158	100%

A study of the present vital status of the parents shows that in only 14, (or 9% of the 158 families), are both parents dead and in 50, (or 32%), are both parents living. In 22 families, (or 14%), the status of one of the parents is unknown, and in 2 the status of both parents. Half-orphanage has occurred in 70, (or 44% of the families); in 35 of these cases the mother being dead, in the other 35, the father. **According to these figures then, orphanage as a cause of dependency plays an insignificant part. Half-orphanage plays a larger part but even the two combined explain dependency in only half of the cases.**

Table 3 Age of Parents at Death.

Ages	Father		Mother	
20 years, less than 30	5	10%	12	22%
30 years, less than 40	21	41%	25	46%
40 years, less than 50	17	33%	14	26%
50 years, less than 60	3	6%	—	—
60 years, less than 70	1	2%	—	—
Ages not known	4	8%	3	6%
Total	51	100%	54	100%

A third of the parents, (105 of the 316), are dead and the majority died in early maturity.

Sixty-three parents, (or 60% of the 105), were less than 40 years of age when they died; 94 (or 90%) had not reached their 50th year. Among the causes of death tuberculosis was conspicuous, for 33 parents, (or 31% of the 105), died from it.

Table 4 Age of Parents at Time of Children's Commitment.

Ages	Father		Mother	
Less than 20 years	—	—	1	1%
20 years, less than 30	7	4%	43	27%
30 years, less than 40	61	38%	47	30%
40 years, less than 50	31	20%	15	9%
50 years, less than 60	9	6%	1	1%
60 years, less than 70	1	1%	—	—
Ages not known	16	10%	6	4%
Dead	33	21%	45	28%
Total	158	100%	158	100%

Of the 216 parents whose ages at the time of children's commitment it was possible to learn, 51, (or 24%), were less than 30 years old and 159, (or 74%), were not yet forty. Therefore when dependency occurred, a large majority were of an age normally the height of efficiency.

Table 5 Desertions in 158 Families.

Father deserted	21
Mother deserted	15
Both parents deserted	6
Total	42

Desertion has occurred in 42 of the 158 families (or 27%). In 21 cases, the father deserted, in 15 the mother. In 6 other cases, the children were abandoned by both parents. Of the deserting fathers, 13 were known to be alcoholic, and of the mothers 17 either went off with other men or had a history of immorality. These figures cover only those cases where the family has been definitely abandoned and do not take into account chronic temporary desertions which have made the home unstable but have not been the fundamental cause of its breakdown.

It was found that in 54, (or 34%), of our 158 cases, 2 or more members of the immediate family live together at the present time. Thirty-seven of these groups are thoroughly respectable, but the other seventeen have no social value so far as the childen are concerned.

That 68, (or 43% of the 158 families), have received public support in institutions other than the County Home indicates that the children's dependency is frequently not the only symptom of the

family's social insolvency. From these 68 families, there have been 9 commitments to State Prison, 25 commitments to reformatories, such as the Connecticut School for Boys, the Connecticut School for Girls, and the House of the Good Shepherd. Sixteen individuals from these families have received care in tuberculosis sanatoria, 2 have been patients in the Newington Home for Crippled Children, 1 in the Connecticut Institute for the Blind, and 4 have been committed to the Mansfield State Training School for the Feeble-Minded. Thirteen parents, 11 mothers and 2 fathers, have been or are at present patients in the State Hospitals for the Insane. Members from 13 families have at one time or another been residents in almshouses. **In 4 families, one parent was formerly a County Home ward, and in one family, both parents.**

Causes of Commitment

Table 6 Fundamental Cause of Commitment of Children From 158 Families.

Illness of father	2	1%
Illness of mother	6	4%
Illness of both parents	1	1%
Death of father	20	13%
Death of mother	25	16%
Death of both parents	10	6%
Alcoholism	42	26%
Immorality	32	20%
Subnormality	9	6%
Criminality	3	2%
Not classified	8	5%
Total	158	100%

The children's commitment in many of the cases studied occurred so many years ago that it was not possible to unearth all the factors active at the time of family collapse. Time had so blurred the picture that one could detect the fundamental cause with only reasonable surety. Even in many of the more recent cases, in which various secondary factors could be identified, their interaction was so complicated that one must dismiss as futile any attempt to weigh their separate effects. The investigators therefore were obliged to limit themselves to distinguishing fundamental causes. According to such a classification, the causes of commitment divide into two main classes:

a. Causes contingent on misfortune. Included under this heading are death, illness, and economic pressure, external factors for which the parents' responsibility is negligible.

b. Causes resulting from character defects which render the parents temporarily or permanently unfitted for guardianship. Alcoholism, immorality, and subnormality appear under this heading.

It would be simpler to cope with the problem of dependency if we could more frequently trace its cause to misfortune. Such cases yield to quick diagnosis and simple treatment and do not lay bare the diseased tissues in our social life as do cases of character defect. Unfortunately, however, the latter are the cases that predominate. Of the 158 cases, character defect accounts for 86 (or 54%), misfortune for 64 (or 41%). Eight cases could not be classified. In six of these, the fundamental cause could not be learned; the incompatibility of the parents caused commitment in the seventh case; and in the last, commitment was hasty and took place without sufficient grounds.

Misfortune as Cause of Commitment

In 55 of the 64 cases of misfortune, the death of one or both parents caused commitment. In 20 cases, commitment followed the death of the father, in 25, the death of the mother, and in 10, the death of both parents. In only a few of these, did the family history indicate character defects in the parents which might have contributed to their physical breakdown. It was in this "misfortune" group that the investigators met the largest number of respectable, wage-earning mothers, women who had become self-supporting themselves but could not provide for their children. Unfortunately only widows with children of working age can manage to live on the assistance given by the Widows' Pension Fund; the others must break up their homes because this assistance falls short of being adequate. In this same group, were also found the largest number of conscientious, industrious fathers, who after the mother's death could not hold the home together. These parents usually look forward to reestablishing a home as soon as their children are grown.

In none of our cases did economic conditions directly cause commitment. Where poverty aided in the destruction of a home, it was subsidiary to factors such as subnormality or

alcoholism. Indirectly, however, economic pressure, in affecting standards of living, exercises a tremendous force. To what extent alcoholism and immorality are reactions to an intolerable reality, it is impossible to estimate, but wherever the pressure of life is exorbitant, faulty adjustments inevitably result. The correlation between poverty and tuberculosis claimed by public health officials indicates that economic conditions contribute largely to the undermining of health and thus may indirectly effect a breakdown in family life. That the present study was made during a period of industrial prosperity may explain the absence of poverty as a direct cause of dependency in our cases.

Illness as a cause of commitment does not play a conspicuous part and appears in only 9 cases (or 6% of the 158). In 8 of these, the illness was insanity, which with one exception has made the dissolution of the home permanent.

Character Defects of Parents as Cause of Commitment

In the 86 commitments which we can trace to character defect, we face the problem presented by alcoholism, immorality, and subnormality. The most important of these is alcoholism. In 19 cases, this sole factor disrupted the family. In 23 other cases, it was predominantly responsible, while in 37 additional cases, it worked with other factors in the sapping of family life. In 7 families, the mother was alcoholic, in 49, the father, and in 23 others, both parents. **That alcoholism affects 79 or exactly half of our cases reveals how potent it is as a cause of dependency.** It usually explains the dependency resulting from non-support and desertion. It figures conspicuously in cases of subnormality, poverty, and immorality, where cause and effect are sometimes so interactive that it is impossible to place the original responsibility.

There can be no doubt that prohibition has eliminated from the circle a component that has played a major part in causing dependency. Among our "alcoholic" families several previously considered beyond repair have already shown surprising signs of regeneration. As an instance, one mother and father who were confirmed drunkards and whose children had been in the County Home for years, have achieved a moral metamorphosis so complete that their children were recently returned to them. In several other cases, parents long

content with separation from their children have now a renewed sense of responsibility and are working to reestablish a home.

Among character defects, immorality comes next in importance. In 14 cases, it alone caused the family collapse; in 18 more, it was chief among several causes, and in 12 others, it was secondary. In all, 38 mothers and 9 fathers had either questionable reputations or histories of immorality. (That the immorality of the father is less obvious may account for the disparity between these figures.) Four fathers, 3 of whom happened also to be alcoholic, committed serious offences, and 5 showed a general moral slackness.

The conduct of the mother reveals various shades of immorality. There is the widow, who, thoroughly respectable before the death of her husband, tries to eke out her factory wages by taking in boarders. Rumors of immorality inevitably follow. Or the deserted woman who can not afford a divorce and under the pressure of circumstances yields to her moral inertia. In some of our cases, however, it is apparent that unmorality rather than immorality has been the root of the trouble. For example, Mr. and Mrs. F— had lived together for years, unmarried. Suddenly Mrs. F— deserted him and the children to marry a soldier. When the soldier was ordered to camp, she returned to her family. Asked why she had married if she cared to return to Mr. F— she replied, "You didn't think I wanted to be an old maid all my life, did you?" Her retort reveals a moral twist with which it would be useless to contend.

In a slightly different class was Mr. H— who, though he had lived with her for years, had never married Mrs. H—. Twice he had taken out a marriage license but each time when the crucial moment arrived, he balked. Finally he explained that he had been married before and at his wife's death he had promised that he would never marry again. Moral oddities like Mr. H—'s honest scruple might be successfully disposed of, and the similarly distorted view-points responsible for many of the other cases in this "unmoral" group, might be straightened out, by careful social work.

Quite different from these possibly remediable cases is a small group of immoral mothers, prostitutes who have been permanently disqualified for guardianship and whose children should be entirely removed from their influence.

Though 34 children from 22 of the 158 families were illegitimate, in only two cases had both parents abandoned the children, and therefore in these cases alone could illegiti-

macy be considered the direct cause of dependency. In the remaining 20 cases, factors other than illegitimacy destroyed the homes which in some instances had been temporarily established and in others maintained for years.

In 9 cases, (or 6% of the 158) the subnormality of one or both parents caused the family instability. "Run-out" stock, families bankrupt morally, physically, and mentally, all of them American, make up this category. Their homes can seldom be rebuilt after they have crumbled away. There is, for instance, Mr. and Mrs. R— who lived in a two room shack on the edge of a small city. For a livelihood, Mr. R— drives a coal wagon, but drink takes so much of his time that he can rarely give more than three weeks of the month to his work. Mrs. R—, formerly an inmate of the Industrial School, is a slovenly, irresponsible housekeeper. She takes great pleasure in arresting her husband for non-support, a charge for which he gives her frequent provocation. In court, she becomes confused and by her unintelligent answers inadvertently testifies in her husband's defense. Mrs. R— has a long history of immorality but Mr. R— states that he put a stop to this by telling her to lock the door when he is out and not let anyone in. This situation and his reaction to it show that they both constitutionally lack qualifications essential for rearing children.

Another subnormal mother is Mrs. W— who, the day after her husband's funeral, appeared at the door of the County Home, saying that her relatives had given her $30.00 and the neighbors a two weeks' supply of groceries so now she could take care of her children. No social "doctoring" can ever restore homes made from such flimsy material as this and the only possible treatment is to remove the children permanently.

Classification of Children According to Family History

In considering finally how the family situation affects the children themselves, we find from a study of the family histories that they come from homes of two kinds, homes temporarily disabled and those permanently dissolved or unfit. Of the 68 homes temporarily disabled (43% of the 158 investigated), 41 broke down after the illness or death of one parent, and 27 were temporarily unfit through character defects in the parents which might be "curable." (We gave

parents whose moral recovery was doubtful the benefit of that doubt and kept them in the class of the "temporarily disabled"). Of the remaining 90 homes (or 57%), in 19 the death of both parents had disrupted the family and in 71 (or 45% of the 158) serious character defects permanently disqualified the parents.

In recognizing that 43% of these homes are but temporarily disabled and that the children will eventually return to them, it is imperative that the State should in the interest of the children make every effort to reunite the family as soon as possible. Because these children require only temporary care they can not be placed for adoption. Those over 12 years of age can be placed temporarily in "working" foster homes, but they constitute only one-third of the whole number of "temporary dependents." Twice this number are under 12 and too young for working homes, and as foster parents seldom want to care temporarily for these younger children until their parents can take them, they remain in the institution until they come of working age or return to their own families. **Their temporary dependency may extend over an indefinite number of years, with the result that they spend in an institution that period of childhood during which it is most important that they receive individual care and the opportunity to develop initiative. Apparently the only alternative to this indefinite institutional life would be placing them in boarding homes.**

Of the 284 children whose family histories were investigated, 138 (or 49%) come from homes permanently dissolved. So far as family conditions are concerned these children are free for permanent placing, though some are probably too heavily handicapped by heredity to be acceptable in free homes and will require boarding homes to prevent their residence in the County Temporary Home from becoming permanent. In the 71 cases of families disrupted through serious character defects, precautions should be taken to prevent parents from ever regaining guardianship. Because at present full family histories are not available, many of these parents retain their influence after commitment and so the children naturally return to them when they pass from the care of the State at eighteen years of age.

Length of Residence in County Temporary Home

When we come to consider the data on the length of the children's residence in the County Temporary Home, we discover that the Home has not been able to preserve its temporary character. Of the 284 children, the subjects of this study, in the Homes on April 1st, 1920, for only 23 (or 8%) have placements been attempted. Twelve children had been returned to their parents, 2 to relatives, and 9 placed in foster homes. The others, (or 92% of the whole group), have remained in the institution, some for 8, 9, and 10 years. One of the causes for these obstructed conditions in the County Temporary Homes is the lack of an adequate placing-out system; another, the mental inferiority and consequent unplaceability of many of the county wards; but not the least important obstacle to more general placing-out is the impossibility of finding free foster homes for the younger children who make up the bulk of the County Home population.

Table 7 Year of Commitment of 284 Children in County Homes on April 1, 1920, and Number of Placements Attempted.

Year of Commitment	No. of Children Committed	No. of Children Placed	Placed with Parents	Placed with Relatives	Placed with Others
1909	2	—	—	—	—
1910	5	2	1	—	1
1911	3	—	—	—	—
1912	14	4	2	—	2
1913	5	2	2	—	—
1914	12	5	4	—	1
1915	25	4	1	1	2
1916	32	4	2	—	2
1917	49	2	—	1	1
1918	51	—	—	—	—
1919	71	—	—	—	—
1920	15	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	284	23	12	2	9

Of our 284 children, 191 or two-thirds of them, are under 12 years of age. According to this ratio, if their age did not discriminate against them, the number of younger children placed out

would be at least twice as large as the number of older children. The investigators found quite the reverse of these figures, however, when they studied the ages of 332 children placed at present in foster homes in one county. Fifty-nine per cent. were over 12 years of age, a disproportion proving that the younger children had suffered a discrimination because of their age. Probably only a boarding-out system can provide for them.

Mental Status of County Home Children

When we initially set out to discover how the problem of dependency would define itself against the background of family history, we already knew that the County Home child had none of the normal securities of family life to sustain him. Our family investigations showed that in many cases he had a difficult heredity to combat as well. Though we could now roughly gauge the effect these two detrimental features of his case might have on the problem of his future, we did not yet know what individual equipment of mind and character the child himself might possess, for what life he was innately qualified, or in what way the State could best help him to fulfill his potentialities. In knowing his family, we had largely solved one unknown quantity; we recognized the existence of another in the child. It was to get assistance on these points that the Yale Psycho-Clinic, of which Dr. Arnold Gesell is director, was asked to examine the mentality of such of our children, (from the 137 families which had at that time been investigated), as were still resident in the institutions in September, 1920.

Since in the first place the only basis for the selection of our children was their residence in the institution on April 1, 1920, and since they had come from city slums as well as small town and rural environments, the 198 children whom Dr. Gesell examined fairly represented County Home populations. Besides the material he secured through the individual mental testing of each child, he had what significant data the investigators could furnish him as to early environment and family history, along with information about the child's character and behavior which he obtained from teachers and superintendents of the institutions. Using all this, he estimated the child's educability and placeability.

In this examination, as in a survey which Dr. Gesell made in 1918 of 100 County Home children, he found that average mentality

among County Home dependents is about as rare as brightness among ordinary children, while dullness and near deficiency are as frequent as the normal average. Likewise, definite deficiency among County Home children appears to be as frequent as dullness ordinarily is among children in the public schools.

In considering further how many of the children examined were fit subjects for placement and to what conditions they would best respond, Dr. Gesell "submitted his figures with a good deal of reservation since he knew the whole problem of placement to be so human and complicated that it can not be made to yield to statistical or mechanical methods." **Judging the children by their mental ability, their personal traits and family history, he found a group of 73 children (or 37%) who lacked sufficient power of self-direction to exist safely outside an institution without supervision.** Thirty-two of this "institutional" group, (or 16% of the 198 examined), would, if placed outside an institution, fall into the class of "big risks" unless there could be developed a consistent policy of supervision which would insure the intelligent cooperation of the families dealing with them. To safeguard them in foster homes, we would need special legislation creating a greatly enlarged staff of supervisors. Twelve children of this same institutional group (or 6% of the total number examined) proved to have such low-grade mentality as to demand treatment at The Mansfield State Training School and Hospital; 29 more would be "bad risks" for the State to take in even very carefully selected homes. In discussing these latter "risks," over whom, as defectives, the County Temporary Home should legally have no jurisdiction, Dr. Gesell stated that under ideal conditions they would all be committed to institutions for dependent-defectives or to extra-institutional colonies; but since Connecticut has no special provision for them, a practical solution of the problem they present would at least demand that they receive a very special degree of supervision from public or semi-public agencies, such a strictness of supervision that facilities for it do not yet legally exist.

Proceeding now to the 125 children who offered more promising material for placement, Dr. Gesell estimated that in placing 52 of them (or 26% of the whole 198) in ordinary homes the State would assume just a "fair risk" and would have to exercise over them a less constant supervision. Seventy more (or 35%) he thought adequate to the demands of life in average homes. There were three children

(2% of the children examined) whom he judged deserving of homes with superior advantages.

Table 8 Placeability of 198 County Home Children Mentally Examined.

Normal children		
1. Adapted to superior foster homes	3	2%
2. Adapted to average foster homes	70	35%
Dull children		
Entailing "fair risk" in foster homes	52	26%
Borderline and defective children		
1. Institutional cases; if placed out, entail "big risk"	32	16%
2. Institutional cases; if placed out, entail "bad risk"	29	15%
3. Institutional cases for Mansfield; cannot be placed	12	6%
Total	198	100%

Dr. Gesell also estimated the educational capacity of each child examined, indicating at the same time "the impossibility, after a brief examination, of predicting with complete assurance what the educational capacity of the child would be under the different conditions of a good foster home." Considering the child's mentality and the other available data about him, he found that 36 (or 18% of the children), would derive greater benefit from special class instruction than from ordinary school routine. Forty-two children (or 21%) could probably finish the 5th or 6th grades and then more profitably receive continuation instruction. Sixty-nine children (or 35%) would probably complete the elementary grades but then their mental limitations would make it advisable for them to take courses of a vocational nature in trade schools and continuation classes. Of the whole number of children in question, only 14 children (or 7%) were found competent to finish ordinary high school courses, though an additional group of 34 children (or 17%) could probably enter high school without completing the course. Only three children (or 2%) had apparently the mentality qualifying them for college training.

When we consider the educational resources of the County Homes, the inflexible grade system which must provide for such varied mental types, the lack of any facilities for even academic instruction above the 7th grade, and the absence of all vocational training, we

can judge what an unequal battle a child provided only with this minimum will have to wage. Even exceptional boys like George and Henry H—, who were found to be mentally developed beyond their years, are deprived of the education they deserve, because after they have reached the 7th grade there is nothing more for them to learn.

The Problem of Defective County Home Children

If we exclude from the 198 children mentally examined the 12 low-grade cases whom Dr. Gesell recommended for Mansfield, we still have remaining in the "institutional" group 61 children. Since the State has no proper institutional provision for these, they would have to be placed in family homes or remain permanently in the County Temporary Home. But the State has likewise no present facilities for the supervision necessary to insure their safety in family homes, even if family homes were available for children of this class. Moreover that the defective child either does not find a free home at all or is not kept if he is placed in one, conditions in the County Homes themselves demonstrate. We have already seen that children over 12 are more easily placed than their juniors. We may therefore suspect that if children over 12 have not been placed, their mental defect and consequently difficult behavior neutralized otherwise good chances. Of the whole group of 198 children examined, 73 (or 37%) possessed average intelligence. But of the 57 children over 12 included in this group only 10, (or 18% of them), had average mentality. The fact that a disproportionately large number of children in the County Homes over 12 are defective and that this disproportion results from their unplaceability is confirmed by the further discovery that the disproportion increases with the older children. For instance, of the 19 children over 14 examined, only 3 had average mentality. Of the 4 children over 16, not one was normally intelligent and three were imbeciles. These figures are small but sufficient to show the liability of the defective to remain permanently in the County Home.

At present the County Home can not relieve itself of the burden imposed by these children. Its legal right to refuse admission to defective dependents affords it no protection because it has no means of detecting mental defect in the children about to be committed to its care. As a result, the

authorities do their best to meet a problem far beyond the layman's power to diagnose or treat. It becomes an accident of individual insight whether they realize the nature of the problem or not. How impossible it is to estimate a child's mentality from the ordinary externals was plain in the divergence between official opinions and expert. Robert E—, pronounced by the responsible County Home official "as bright as he could be," really possessed no better mentality than a child three years and a half his junior. A handsome girl of 12, described as "a nice bright child," proved to be mentally a child of seven. There is no judging "by looks," the layman's criterion. A boy considered "feeble minded," probably because "he hadn't enough life to have any disposition," was revealed as average under examination. **Without the more definite measure of the child's ability which the psychologist alone can give, fitting the child to a home becomes a gamble equally unprofitable for the person attempting it, the child exposed to it, and the foster parents.**

Not only the futility but the danger of placing the unexamined defective should condemn the practice. The most characteristic social aspect of mental inferiority is the lack of ordinary moral resistance. The defective boy is said to be under-developed sexually; the defective adolescent girl, however, is usually over-developed and runs a special risk of getting herself into difficulties. If the degree of her mental weakness is not known in the County Home, it inevitably shows itself outside. Sixteen year old Laura May, for example, had been shifted from foster home to foster home but was always returned as vaguely "unsatisfactory" and tried somewhere else. It was not until she had actually wrought some damage that the effort to make her live up to conduct responsibilities beyond her grasp was abandoned. Her mental examination showed that she had only the mind of an eight year old girl to govern her impulses.

The younger defective, however, if placed out, utterly fails the foster parents and returns to the County Home to stay there as long as the law allows. To one of the superintendents the defective girl has become an appalling nightmare. To safeguard her even in the County Home taxes all his ingenuity and at times he has had to organize a system of constant surveillance. Custodial care as oppressive as this should not devolve on the shoulders of the superintendents or affect the atmosphere in which normal children must live.

Aside from the fact that these defectives seriously obstruct the

County Home system, there is little the County Home as an institution is qualified to do for them. All of the low-grade cases drop out of the County Home School and stagnate until they become of age. Of the higher grade defectives, many might later support themselves in a supervised life outside if the County Home could give them vocational training, but the County Home was intended to be temporary and has no equipment for this. Consequently, defective dependents when they reach the age of 18 go forth without any resources. For them release from the Home means eventual misery, and in realization of this the Home sometimes retains them "to work around" the place. Nellie S— stayed in such a capacity for over a year but was then persuaded to return home to "support" a drunken father and a half-witted mother. Ever since the household has been a storm center for family uproars and sordid neighborhood gossip. If such children were put into their proper category, that of the defective dependent, the care of the State would not abruptly cease when they come of age.

Resumé of the Study

The survey presents a mass of detailed information on subjects which until now have been matters of general and largely misinformed discussion. Specific data is given for one urban and one rural county, and conditions shown may therefore be regarded as representative of the State as a whole for purposes of study. Deductions which may be made from the 284 children investigated are safe deductions for the other three-fourths of the total list of county home children and furnish an adequate basis for recommendations for improvements.

In the first place, through study of the various sources of information regarding the children before they come into the County Homes, it is shown that there exists an utter lack of adequate information on the part of county commissioners, superintendents of the Homes and county and town officials generally. The result is, of course, to make individual work with the dependent child extremely difficult, if not impossible. The report of the investigators also demonstrates that while semi-public and private local agencies, such as charity organization societies, have in many cases in their records information which could be of great value, no system exists for cooperation between the county

officials and these agencies. Thus the important data collected by private sources regarding the child's family and former surroundings is at the present time of scarcely any value to the county officials in carrying on their work.

With respect to the causes of commitment, the survey brings to light many facts, some of them of interest to the taxpayer as well as to the social worker. Such is the finding that in nearly one-half (46%) of the families sending children to County Homes both parents are foreign born, while in an additional 11% one parent is of alien birth. Further, it is shown that in nearly one-third (32%) of the families investigated both parents of the children are known to be alive, and that 58% of the parents were still at the normal height of efficiency (under forty years of age) when their children became dependent on the State through commitment to the County Homes.

In addition, the survey throws light on the much-discussed subject of poverty as a cause of dependency. It demonstrates that while in 41% of the families from which the children were committed to the County Homes, misfortune (i. e. illness or death) was a fundamental cause, in a still greater number (54%) character defects, such as drink, immorality and subnormality, are responsible for the removal of children to the State's control. Delinquency is therefore a greater cause of dependency than disaster. While it is obvious that poverty is an indirect cause, not only of disease, but also of the break-down of character, nevertheless, as the report shows, it rarely acts as a direct cause for commitment. Even as an indirect cause the investigators find that commitments resulting from poverty would be appreciably reduced if assistance from Mothers' Aid funds were increased sufficiently to enable widows with children under working age to keep their families together and if the law permitted aid to the widows of aliens. As regards defects of character, the survey shows that in the break-down of families alcoholism was responsible for 26%, immorality for 20%, subnormality for 6% and criminality for 2% of the cases. These figures are interesting, and taken all together they emphasize afresh the complexity of the causes which go to render a family insolvent and throw its children upon State care. It will certainly be no surprise to learn that in 43% of the families from which County Home children come, there have been commitments to other institutions,—penal, reformatory and charitable. The study

of the report's findings with respect to the entire question of the bearing of delinquency on dependency throws a strong light on the entire class for which the public funds of Connecticut are so largely expended.

Based on the findings above, the survey then classifies the children as coming from homes that are temporarily disabled and from those that are permanently disabled. The former homes are potentially able to effect, under favorable circumstances, a rehabilitation that will some day enable them to receive their children back again; and it is very important that through a co-working between the county officials, the State's agents, and local social agencies of all sorts this goal should be always kept before the parents. At present there is no such possibility of co-working, owing to the lack of contact between county officials and local agencies and the lack of a sufficient number of agents of the State Board of Charities. It is equally important that while awaiting the re-establishment of the home, the children should be cared for in family homes so far as possible, if necessary, in boarding homes, a solution of the problem which the county officers have not yet attempted.

On the other hand, the other group of children, almost exactly one-half of the total, whose homes are broken up beyond repair, is in this regard, free for adoption, and the survey shows the need of taking permanent measures to care for such cases. The child must, in its own interest, be separated permanently from the reach of the parents, whose character defects makes them improper guardians, and this separation must be so arranged that it will continue after the child has reached the age of eighteen and is no longer a State ward. Where placeability exists, the same necessity exists as with the preceding class for finding as early as possible foster homes in which the child may grow up. If free homes cannot be found, the child should be boarded out.

The utter inadequacy of the present placing-out system is evident from the statistics gathered on this point. These show that at the time of the survey (April 1, 1920) no attempt had been made to place out 92% of the children who were the subjects of the study. When it is noted that two of the children have been in the Homes for ten years, three for nine years, and three for eight years, it is plain that the situation calls for radical readjustment.

The greatest difficulty with which the County Homes have to contend, mental deficiency, has been brought out in great

detail. Of the 198 children examined by Professor Gesell through individual mental tests, supported by data as to social environment and family history and behavior, it is shown that 31% cannot exist safely outside of an institution without specialized supervision in lieu of the institutional facilities, which do not exist in Connecticut, and that an additional 6% demand immediate removal to the Mansfield State Training School for the Feeble Minded. The other 63% include normal and dull children, the latter entailing only a fair risk when placed in family homes, if these are carefully selected and well supervised. The problem which is here presented from a scientific standpoint is an acute one for the County Homes, since they have at present no means for determining whether the children are defective on admission. There is no psychological examination and the decision as to the child's mentality is left to the uninformed opinion of county commissioners and superintendents. This part of the report presents the most unfortunate feature of the present County Home system, which offers no facilities for giving the defective children the training which they will soon need to make them self-supporting. The statistics here presented show clearly how these children become permanent residents in the County Homes until they attain the age of eighteen and are set free to become the problem of the community in which they live.

Deductions from the Study

The first step toward the improvement of the present situation will be the creation on the part of the State of new facilities for insuring cooperation between the County Homes and the public and private agencies which have had the care of the families from which the children are committed. A unified system of records should be provided, to the end that the facts concerning the child may not be left to the memory or forgetfulness of the county officials. **Before the application for commitment is acted upon by the court, the case of the child should be fully investigated as to family history, etc.** In this way all of the information previously gathered by charitable agencies, supplemented by that which may be collected by the State's agents, can be put to use for the child's welfare, and through this data it may often be possible to find relatives who will relieve the State entirely of the child's care. **Before the child is admitted to the County Home a thorough**

physical and psychological examination should be made, and in case admission to the Home then seems the best solution, immediate plans for the child's future should be formulated by the county officials in cooperation with the trained agents of the State. All of this will call for expert and capable workers, acting under a system unified for the State.

The connection between the child and its former home should be maintained wherever there is a possibility of the return of the child if conditions be improved. In the meantime the child should be placed as early as possible in a properly selected foster home. If on account of its youth or for other reasons it cannot be placed in a free home, it should be boarded in a private family. The case of children whose homes are permanently broken up is not essentially different, except that in this case regard must be had to permanence and to the possibility of adoption as well as to removal from the parents' sphere of influence. In all cases a sufficient number of workers should be at the disposal of the State to make a thorough investigation in advance, through references and other information, as to the fitness of the home and to give careful supervision of the child after placement. This supervision is fundamental for the child henceforth, whether it be returned to the parents, placed in a free foster home or boarded out. It is especially important in those cases where on account of mental defects the child needs constant watchful care. Only in this way,—through careful selection of the home before placement and careful supervision afterwards,—can "bad risks" be converted into "good risks."

It is evident that the first essential in meeting the situation is an adequate number of trained workers at the State's disposal, clothed with adequate authority to find foster homes and place children in them, if necessary boarding them out. The correlation of all local agencies could then be assured and the children treated as individuals. The County Homes would then be relieved to such an extent of the burdens they now bear that measures could be taken for the training of the greatly reduced number of children who would then remain in them, including chiefly those defectives who are absolutely impossible risks as regards placement and for whom admission cannot be found at present in other State institutions.

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